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SUBJECT: Southern Taiwan Reactions to DPP Hsieh-Su Presidential Ticket

REF: 2007 Taipei 1662

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¶11. (U) Summary: The Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) presidential candidate Frank Hsieh announced on August 15 that former Premier Su Tseng-chang has accepted his invitation to be his running mate. Most political observers and grassroots supporters in southern Taiwan praised the decision, saying that a Hsieh-Su ticket provides the DPP its best chance at winning the 2008 presidential election. However, some observers question whether Hsieh and Su can actually bury their differences and cooperate effectively. Local academics see the selection as a compromise between factions for the sake of DPP solidarity. End summary.

DPP Grassroots Mostly Happy with Su Selection

¶12. (SBU) The chairmen of the Tainan County and Kaohsiung County DPP offices separately told AIT/K that most DPP grassroots supporters believe a Hsieh-Su ticket gives their party its strongest chance at winning the March 2008 presidential election. They opined that the Hsieh-Su combination symbolizes the unification of the DPP's opposing factions and will encourage cooperation among party members. Su is viewed by many in the DPP as an effective campaigner who will augment Hsieh's strengths. Tainan County Chairman Kuo Kuo-Wen emphasized that 19 out of 25 DPP City and County Chairmen had earlier called for a Hsieh-Su ticket, proving Su has strong grassroots connections and the ability to galvanize DPP supporters. In light of reports that Hsieh is being investigated for alleged corruption (REFTEL), Kaohsiung County DPP Chairman Chen Ming-tze said that Su is a good choice because he could easily replace Hsieh as the DPP candidate if Hsieh is indicted. Dr. Soong Hseik-wen, a Professor at National Chung Cheng University, echoed the belief that the Su selection would repair the rift that developed between the two DPP stars and their respective supporters during the party primary.

Can't Please Them All - Some Express Preference for Yeh

¶13. (SBU) A small number of DPP supporters, including some members of the pro-DPP Southern Association, expressed disappointment with Hsieh's decision. Yeh Chu-lan's gender and Hakka roots make her a stronger running mate than Su, they argued, adding that she would have attracted support from women, who have consistently favored Ma, and Taiwan's Hakka minority, the island's second largest ethnic group. Nevertheless, they conceded that most DPP members will fully support the Hsieh-Su ticket. Professor Kuo Chih-wen of the National Sun Yat-sen University, also a member of the Southern Association, told AIT/K that Su Tseng-chang's tough personality is better suited

for a more active role, such as that of Premier; the vice presidency is a misuse of Su's abilities, he suggested.

¶14. (SBU) Lee Kuan-chih, Chairman of the Kaohsiung Hakka Culture Foundation, told us that leaders of the Kaohsiung Hakka community now have no specific reasons to campaign for a Hsieh-Su ticket, leaving Hakka voters to cast their ballots according to their own preferences. Lee added that about 160,000 people or one-sixth of all eligible voters in Kaohsiung City alone are Hakka, and that two-thirds of them usually support the DPP. He predicted that the upcoming presidential election will be decided by the narrow margin of 100,000 votes, thus making Hakka support significant.

KMT Sees Su Selection as Unifying for DPP

¶15. (SBU) Some members of the KMT also view the Su selection as a move to unify the DPP, but think KMT candidates Ma Ying-jeou and Vincent Siew will still win. KMT Kaohsiung City Chairman Hsu Fu-ming told AIT/K that although Su Tseng-chang was not Hsieh's preferred choice, Hsieh has shelved his differences with Su in an effort to unify the DPP. KMT Legislator Lo Shih-hsiung predicted that any cooperation between Frank Hsieh and Su Tseng-chang will be short lived, but opined that Su will prove a stronger running mate than Yeh. Lo repeated his earlier speculation that President Chen might have somehow used the threat of bringing corruption charges against Hsieh to pressure him into selecting Su (REFTEL).

Comment

¶16. (SBU) Most observers in southern Taiwan believe Su will provide a significant boost to the DPP's bid to hold on to the presidency for a third consecutive term. That Hsieh has decided to go with the

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party's preferred candidate rather than his personal choice shows that he is pragmatic and understands that he will need a strongly unified DPP to be competitive in the upcoming presidential election.

Thiele

Young